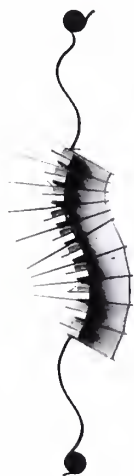



REPORTS
OF
EXPLORATIONS AND SURVEYS
OF THE
THIRTY FIFTH PARALLEL





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~ RESEARCH AND COMMENTARY ~

UPON THE

REPORTS
OF
EXPLORATIONS AND SURVEYS

OF THE

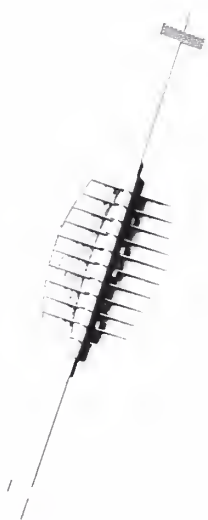
THIRTY FIFTH PARALLEL

1853-4

DIRECTED BY A.W. WHIPPLE, LIEUTENANT,
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF TOPOGRAPHICAL ENGINEERS.

DAN HOFFMAN
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN
SEPTEMBER, 1990

THIS WORK HAS BEEN PREPARED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF FRANK FRANTRUZZI,
LAURIE HAYCOCK AND MICHAEL WILLIAMS.



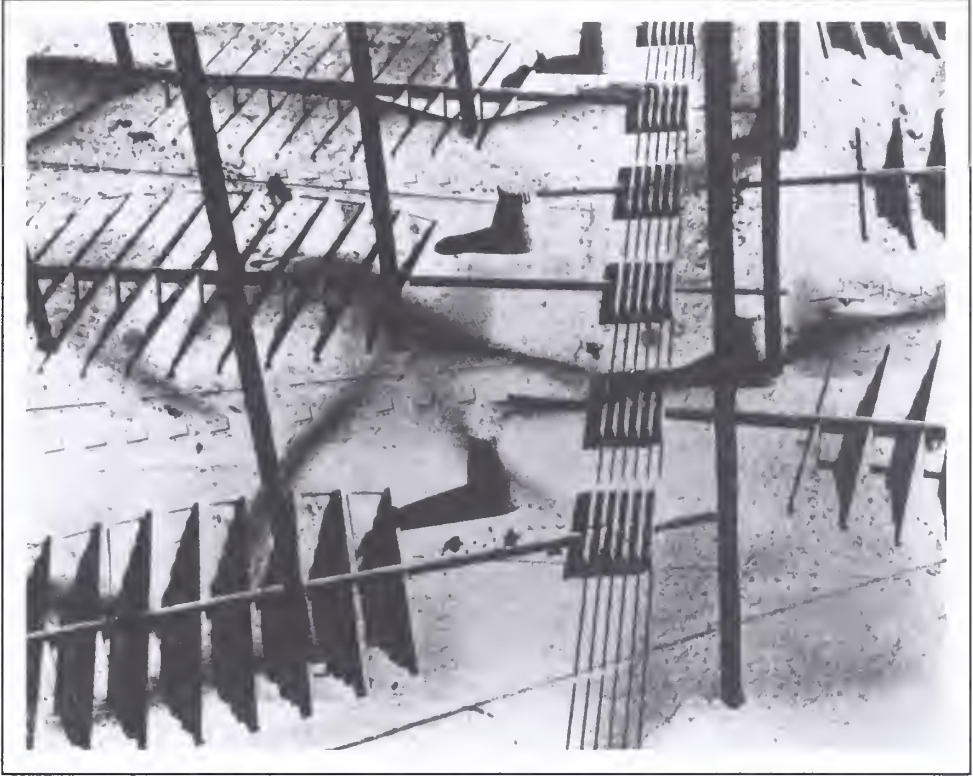
IN 1859 THE FIRST PARTY OF THE WESTERN LANDS SURVEY
INTRODUCTION. CROSSED THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND SET OUT ON ITS
ROUTE ALONG THE 35TH PARALLEL TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN.

The instructions from the Congress for the expedition were comprehensive: "...to note and record all species of plant and animal, all conditions of geology and meteorology, all forms of human habitation and any other salient features of the land and environs deemed significant for the use of the peoples of these United States." / The necessity for the survey had become apparent when many of the fantastic popular claims made of the lands remained unsubstantiated, claims that approached the status of fact though the area was hardly settled and had been seen by only a handful of explorers and adventurers. Stories were told of herds of buffalo so dense that one could mistake them for a newly ploughed field, mountains the color of blood that fell out of great tears in the sky, lakes that foamed with the silver froth of leaping fish and forests upon whose canopy one could walk a thousand miles. The thirst for the horizon had come early to this young nation, fed by icons of startling visions of matter and light whose extent was only the sublime shadow of the limits of knowledge. / Yet, despite the overwhelming desire and optimism shared by these images of plenty, furtive accounts of a different nature continued to surface in the popular imagination. These concerned the curious "desert seas," vast regions of stillness that existed seemingly out of time, gaps in the fabric of desire that shrouded the vision of this new land, a dead echo to the unbounded optimism that was projected upon the horizon. / From our present time these dark reflections can only be understood as an inevitable reaction to the positivist utopia that had gripped the soul of this nation, a prescient doubt that persisted through the vision of unbounded optimism. By designating nature as the godhead we had in fact established the groundwork for its extinction. The materialism of the Arcadian Vision could only lead to fulfillment by consuming the very landscape from which it sprung. / For the survey itself the continent was divided into strips paralleling the lines of latitude. A survey team was assigned to each strip and was to follow it directly across to the Pacific Ocean. The most up-to-date equipment was provided to aid the surveyors in their work including telescopes, microscopes, transits, clocks, barometers, drafting instruments and the newly-invented negative film camera. / But despite

the sophistication of the party's instrumentation, language remained the most valued of all recording tools. Words were treasured for their ability to describe a nuance in the weather, a particular quality of the landscape, the character of a celestial event. Words were considered the barometer of the human measure. The age had not yet accommodated itself to the seeming veracity of the photographic medium though the evidence of this survey begins to point towards its future development. Verbal description was valued for its ability to locate the reader within the fluidity of the temporal dimension, to establish presence and to bear witness. It is in this light that the following documents must be understood, with their emphasis upon the depth of qualities rather than upon the surface of information. For this reason the following text bears what appears to be an anachronistic air and though it was originally considered to be within the domain of science, it now has the ring of the poetic. / The following selections are taken from the logs of the first party to set out along the 35th parallel. This is the only record of this ambitious survey for in 1854 the survey was halted for no stated reason. The fate of the party is unknown, the documents indicate only that it remained on the surface of what they called "the great resin sea," carrying on its work until provisions were expended. / The evidence of these documents, poised at the threshold of events that were to completely alter the physical aspect of this continent, shows a landscape curiously possessed of a knowledge of its own fate, a landscape imprinted with the memory of its history, a subtle intelligence that reveals itself to those that seek its nature. These writings appear to be a passage into this memory, a section through biologic and geologic time. / The following epigram appears at the end of one of the later entries. / Its mesmeric tone is revealing of the landscape's curious attraction to the survey party;

*"...To grasp time's arrow
at the point of its descent,
where time has stopped
and the earth continues
its bent"*

5 108 11.6, 107 47 50 a Lyrae



JULY 5, 1853-- The day began as it had ended, with the sky the color of milk and sulfur. Around us, the surface of the earth dissolves into a horizon of mists. Our eyes are unhinged, floating upon the aqueous horizon. Distance is both immediate and remote. All is bright and still.

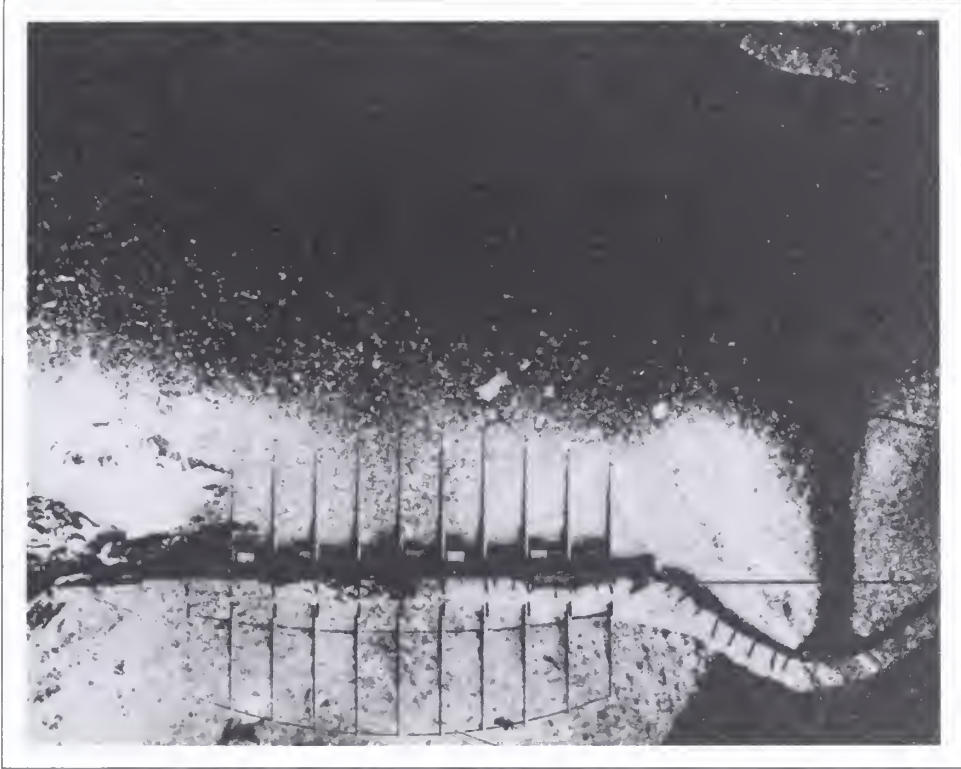
JULY 7, 1853-- Before us and into the horizon of mists is spread a vast and placid sea, the now still repository of dark rains and warm effluvia alive with the dull glow of myriad fermentations. **IT IS HERE THAT THE FLUIDS HAVE COME TO REST**, the lightness of oxygen long having departed these waters, thick with the residue of their journey.

The pressures of the atmosphere weigh heavily, pressing down with a precise flatness. All is still, a sea without waves. Here the divisions of sky and earth are swallowed by one another, dissolving all into a haze of intermediate matter. All is the same, there is no difference.



JULY 16, 1853-- After a number of trials we have determined that the sea is firm enough so that we may travel upon it. We cannot determine its depth for below the surface float shifting clouds of darkness that obscure our vision. Beyond the smooth firmness of the surface the material properties of the sea are unpredictable, ranging from the crystalline solidity of glass to the pliable quiddity of a resin. It is resistant to breaking, absorbing all impact with a plastic resignation though cracks are apparent below the surface. It has no characteristic sound or temperature. It has no true color and like water appears to absorb the color of the light around it. In short, **IT IS A MATERIAL THAT POSSESSES AN ASPECT OF ALL MATERIAL BUT NO TRUE ASPECT OF ITS OWN.** It is matter without a soul, matter without a characteristic grain.

6 40 32.5, 97 31 30 α Cygni

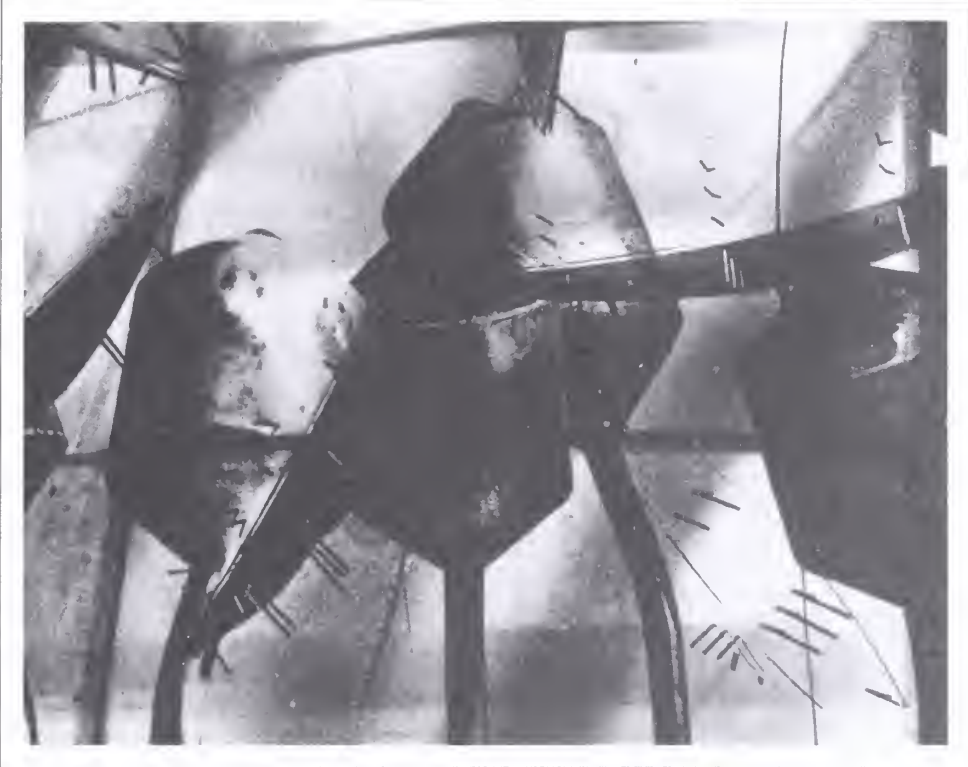


JULY 12, 1853-- This evening the light of the stars is muffled by the thick atmosphere of the vault above. The moon appears only as a soft warmth of light passing overhead. Below us the sea emits a dull, amber glow illuminating the atmospheres hovering near the surface. There is no wind and seemingly no temperature, *ALL IS DAMPENED BY A LIQUID SILENCE*. During the day the sea was tinged with the stains of amber shadows but in the evening the expanse was set alight in an illumined turbulence as if the firmament were alive with the gases of creation. But nothing moves, all is frozen into a suspended stillness as if the Creator had suddenly withdrawn his hand, pausing before the forces he had unleashed. Deep cracks cut through the turbulence like bolts of lightning frozen in its path.

JULY 13, 1853-- Occasionally a muffled thunder is heard in the distance, rolling along the horizon like an immense, hollow ball. We have assumed that this rolling thunder accompanies the cracks but have not yet witnessed the two occurring together.



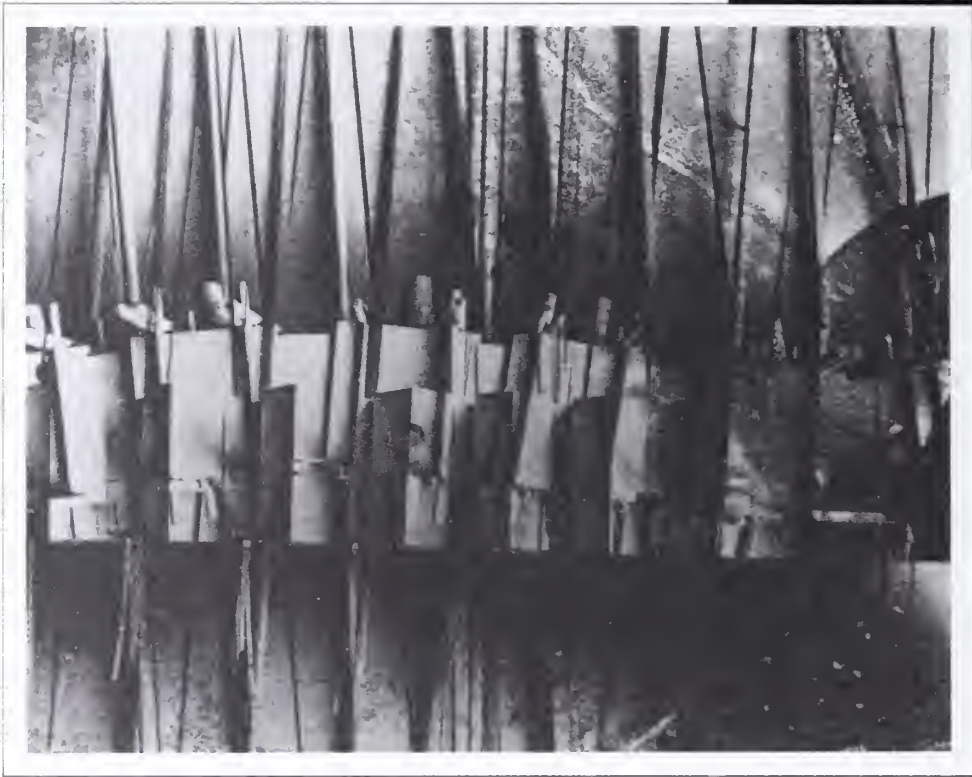
JULY 15, 1853-- Tonight, amidst the turbulence below the surface and in the shadows of the vacant temperatures, there appeared evidence of another layer of activity in the resin. Shades of dust formed into dark implosions of debris - scattered shards of twisted shadows arrayed about invisible epicenters. The scale of the shadows could not be fixed though they appeared quite distinct in their confusion, like cloud patterns forming in the sky above. It appeared, however, that we were always the same distance from the phenomena, the resinous plenum acting like a lens that set objects at a certain distance from the viewer, a still-life that appears fixed in scale, independent of the location of the observer.



JULY 26, 1853-- Over the past week we have been unable to make precise readings of the sun due to the thickness of the atmosphere. We have proceeded west with the aid of our compass and surveying tools though we become increasingly unsure of their accuracy. During the day plumes of atmosphere ascend and descend over great distances, their frothy crusts forming dark stains in the pale yellow light. At times the columns of crusts attain terrific heights and appear tethered to the earth, drawing their sustenance from beyond the pale, dirty medium of the sky. There they remain until their substance is absorbed into the tarry medium of night. *THE WEIGHT OF GRAVITY APPEARS OVERWHELMED BY THE ACTION OF INVISIBLE PRESSURES* that draw and channel the mists up into the vault above, a matter imbued with a responsive intelligence. This activity is highlighted for us by the dead flatness of the heavy sea below. These majestic displays provide a welcome relief to the sameness of the days for the temperature has not changed; an unbroken, humid warmth that erodes the skin of the body, exposing it to the medium of the surround.

JULY 27, 1853-- We continue to proceed to the west. There is no sound except for the occasional evening thunder and the hollow rumbling of our equipment wagons rolling upon the surface.

22 50 50.6 93 53 40 *a Andromedae*



SEPTEMBER 17, 1853-- Today, while developing the negatives of the previous day's atmospheric survey we were startled by a strange image surfacing through the chemical bath, an image similar to the shadowy arrays that played below the surface of the resin at night. But in this case the image was discernible not as a shadow but as a positive image. Checking our equipment we discovered that the camera lens had been rotated down towards the resin rather than up towards the sky. ***THE POSITIVE IMAGE IS A REVERSAL OF THE NEGATIVE SHADOWS TRAPPED IN THE RESIN.*** We are heartened by this discovery and will now focus our cameras into the resinous depths.

21 19 46.6, 68 52 40 a Pegasi



SEPTEMBER 19, 1853-- The survey of the earthly firmament is now our main activity. We have gridded the surface of the sea with tracks upon which the large housings of our cameras are mounted. In this way we are able to accurately survey a large area to determine the extent and nature of this other world.



SEPTEMBER 23, 1853-- Preliminary surveys have shown that no two negatives reveal the same image. Is this due to slow, imperceptible shifts in the resin itself or are our instruments too crude to measure the resin with the required accuracy? Further experimentation has also revealed that slight variations in the temperatures of the negative film bath can produce increasingly isolated segments within the dense configuration of shadowy dusts. Evidently each form in the configuration is possessed with its own specific heat which then responds to a similar specific heat within the negative. **OUR TASK NOW IS TO SIFT THROUGH THE VARIOUS LAYERS OF TEMPERATURES,** thinning off and isolating their specimens.

7 56 56, 102 11 40 *a Arietis*

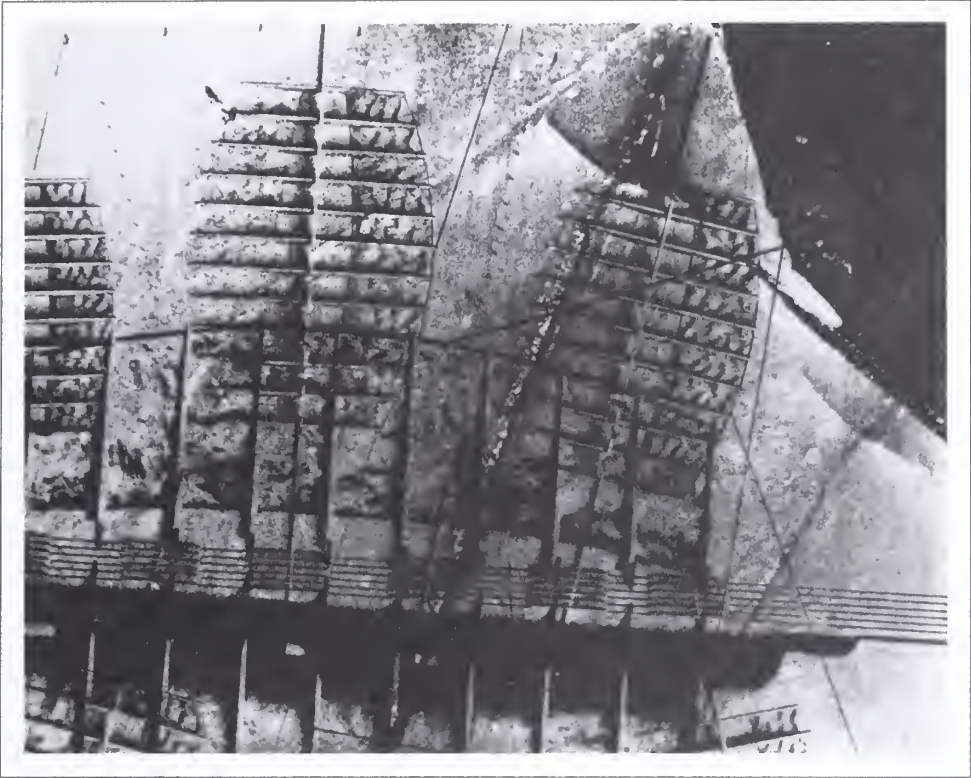


SEPTEMBER 24, 1853-- Our work on the resin has drawn us into the darkness of evening for this is when the sea reveals its curious evidence. Observations of the daylight atmosphere have been deterred temporarily because of the party's increasing interest in this new phenomenon. The variety of photographic specimens is delaying our progress to the west.



OCTOBER 19, 1853-- Thoughts now arise as to the origin of the resin sea. It is reasonable to assume that this was once a great body of water because of its low elevation on the continent. But what has transformed the waters into this resistant yet revealing matter? **WHAT SUBSTANCES HAVE PENETRATED THEIR SOURCE** to absorb the images of life frozen in time like bones in a tarpit? What is the true nature of the particulate or dust that projects these imprisoned forms? What relation exists between the unusual configurations of atmospheres above and the dark shadows of the dust below? These questions confound us with their mystery for our observations only produce further questions.

---, 2 18 15.5 a Cephi



NOVEMBER 12, 1853-- This morning the lower edge of the sky was stained with a faint purple which proceeded slowly up the vault during the course of day. Darkness arrived with the stain reaching the zenith. For the first time in weeks we were able to feel the full depth of the heavens, whose particles of light were swept across the vault like a foaming wake cut into a black sea. *THE STARH FIGURES OF THE CAMERA CARRIAGES ARE NOW PLAINLY VISIBLE*, proceeding slowly across the illumined surface on their wooden tracks.

2 01 51, 53 36 30 a Aurigae



NOVEMBER 21, 1853-- Today we awoke to an even, grey sky. All of the mists that had colored our days with their vertiginous displays had disappeared, leaving the resin sea exposed to view over a great distance. There is no wind, all is still with the silence of a photograph. *THE HORIZON REMAINS ELUSIVE*, the sky merging with the sea at the extent of our vision, the flatness of the apparent depth drawn up upon us like a wall. This phenomenon makes it appear that *ALL DISTANCE IS PRESENT AND SIMULTANEOUS*. We released a balloon early in the day to examine our perception of vertical distance. It rose rapidly, straight up, without a drift. We could see its round shape for the entire day though we were unable to determine if it had stopped rising.

2 19 24.1, 63 35 10

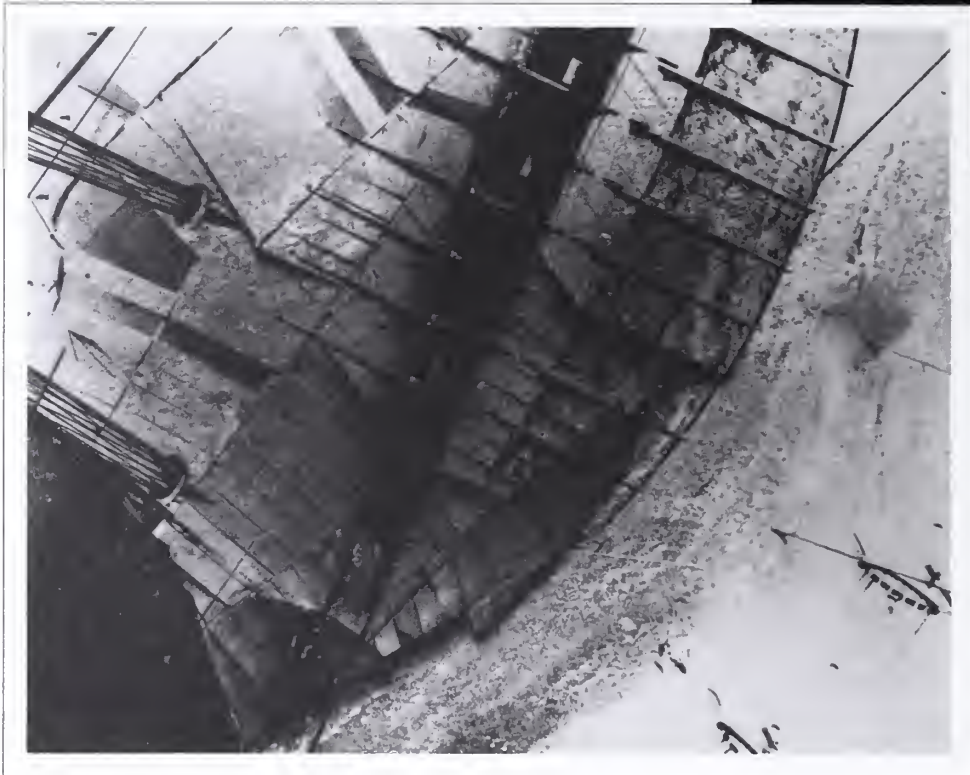
a Aquilae



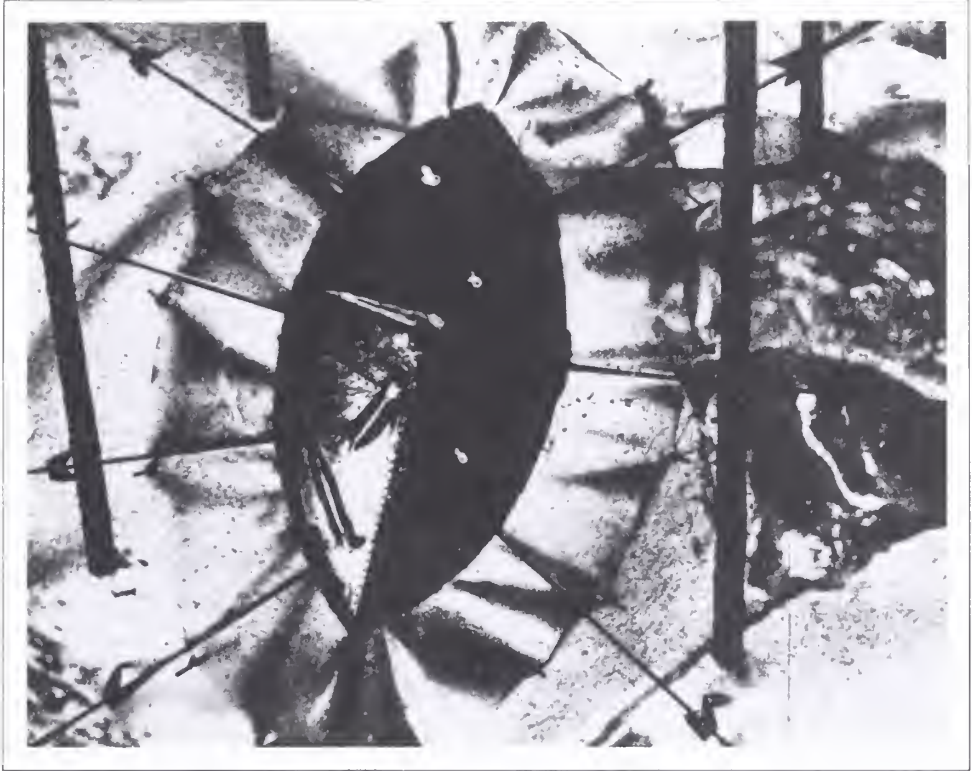
DECEMBER 3, 1853-- The slow progress of the photo-excavations has gradually yielded a more precise view of the structures embedded within the resin. What was first understood as a whirl of unrecognizable debris has now become a perplexing mixture of seemingly constructed forms. It is not yet possible to discern its true nature though we now entertain the thought that the forms are the work of a consciousness subtly inflected with the complex patterns of growth that we find in nature. This realization has had a profound effect upon us all for it is now conceivable that ***WE ARE OBSERVING THE WORK OF A CONSCIOUSNESS SOMEHOW RELATED TO OUR OWN.*** We now spend all of our available time riding the wagons gazing into the sea of shadows, images coming in and out of view, a perpetual display of specimens that transform before our eyes.

5 27 50M -- -- --

B Ursae Nubirus



DECEMBER 6, 1853-- Our search increasingly reveals a world permeated by fibrous structure. Indeed, some of us now conclude that the resin itself possesses an invisible, multidirectional grain which can organize itself towards specific loads or forces much as a bone and its marrow adjusts in response to forces placed upon the body. It remains difficult to chart the direction of such forces within the resin. Are they the image of a particular gravitational posture frozen in time and transported photo-synthetically to the dust, or *IS IT THE FLOW PRESSURE WITHIN THE RESIN ITSELF THAT IS BEING RESISTED?*

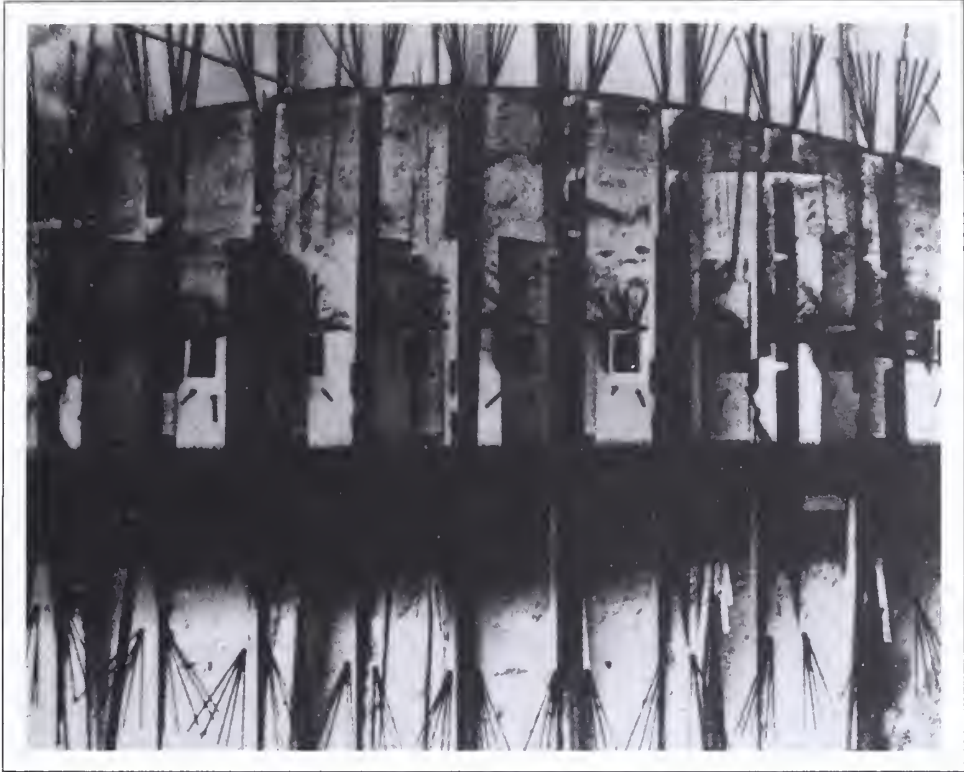


DECEMBER 9-- We remain divided as to how the images in the resin are to be classified. In some views the density of the fiber is reminiscent of the vegetal world, a condition of pure exteriority where all movement and structure is combined into a single expression, that of growth. The direction of the fiber is a path of energy and structure. *IT IS A LINK BETWEEN DENSITIES.* In our realm the primary connections are between earth and sky, a stitching together of the two mediums through the thin fibers of plants, a dense tissue alive with conveyances driven by the heat of the sun. What is conveyed in the fibers of the resin? What is communicated in the endless bundles, taught with a mechanical precision?

(We have used the term "organism" to describe the figures in the dust, but the term is not entirely accurate. The idea of a vital skin that we associate with an organism is erased here, for this is a life without edge, an architecture that builds itself into space obeying a tremulous will highly tuned to the surrounding environment. If there is an interior to be contained, it must be found within the extent of the resin itself, that transparent yet supporting medium that contains the fibers, sustains their reach and possibly feeds their growth.)

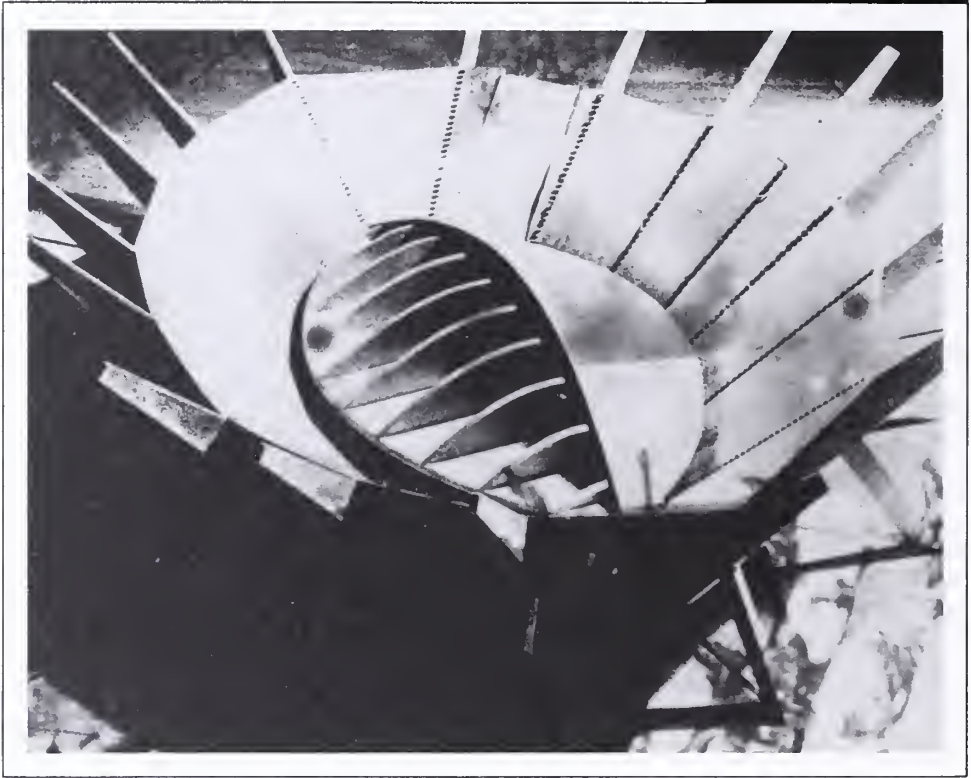


DECEMBER 10, 1853-- The temperature has been dropping steadily for the past ten days. This drop has been accompanied by a thinning out of the daylight haze, first noticeable at the crown of the vault where faint patches of blue appear, shredding the edge of an ever-widening hole. A faint breeze encircles us at the fall of darkness.



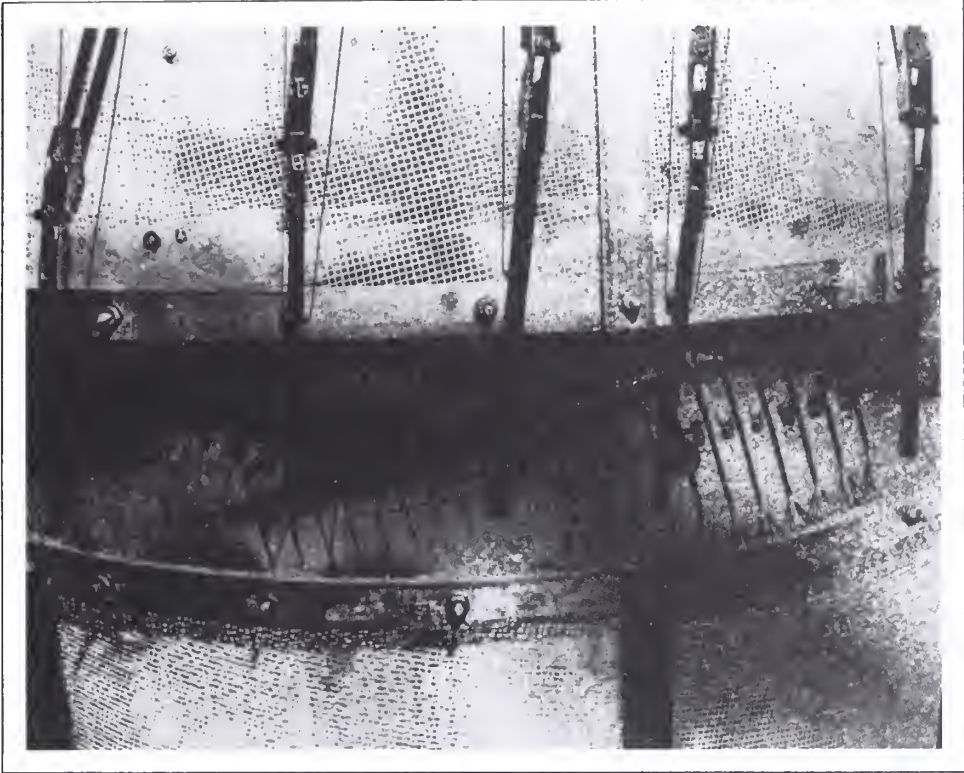
DECEMBER 18, 1853--Today all remnants of haze have disappeared, the vault hardening into an opal shell changing in color from blue-white at the zenith to an intense blue-violet at the horizon. **THE SUN HAS STILL NOT APPEARED.** Light breezes pass from all directions but there are still no shadows. The horizon can now be seen as a distinct edge, the rim of a shallow bowl with us at its center. The sharp, black profile of a camera wagon advances slowly beyond the rim. The resin has also changed, its once sepia translucency turning to a milky-blue green. During the evening the resin is filled with billowing clouds and we are unable to view into the depths because of the now internal haze. Now the surface resembles a view from above the clouds. The absence of atmospheric activity above now seems compensated by the tumult of weathers below. For the first time dark shadows can be seen in the resin as one cloud casts its darkness upon another.

The party has grown confused by this turn of events. Deprived of the views into the resin the members now spend the hours sprawled upon the surface gazing into the weathers below. The resin still has its attractions, for no one has the desire to resume the survey to the west.



DECEMBER 16, 1853-- We have found in the resin only that which we are able to observe through our instruments. The dust-like images in the resin remain elusive to our probing tools. *A PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE SUBJECT IS NOT POSSIBLE.* This circumstance has given us cause to think upon the very nature of our instruments, for here they have been our only access, the door through which our understanding has had to pass. The elusive opacity of the resin holds a dark mirror to our efforts. To proceed further we must accept the idea that knowledge is a direct reflection of our own constructions and intuitions.

DECEMBER 23, 1853-- We have begun to reconstruct the resin world with the aid of our negatives and what remains of our equipment and supplies, an admittedly impossible task for the relative scale and shifting nature of the forms is always elusive. *THE ACT OF CONSTRUCTION NOW BECOMES AN ANALYSIS OF OUR OWN ASSUMPTIONS,* the architecture of our search built upon the very instruments of our investigations.



JANUARY 30, 1853-- The sun has still not appeared. We continue our work under the bright light of the vault in a moonlight of purple shadows and cool temperatures. Nights have become shorter and shorter and we anticipate that there soon will be no periods of darkness. Our constructions now surround the camp spreading in fibrous tendrils around the remnants of the tracks and wagons.

THERE IS LITTLE DESIRE TO MOVE ON TO THE WEST. Our true work is here on the resin. The dark clouds below the surface change with every glance, assuming shapes that we can hardly remember, our days passing in the shadows of the dust.



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